

956
R572

IS THERE A SANTA CLAU^S?

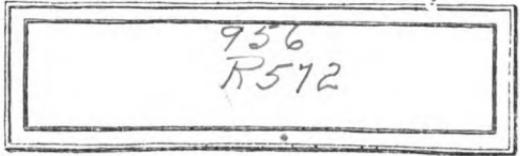
UC-NRLF



B 3 331 879



JACOB A.RIIS



IS THERE A SANTA
CLaus?



IS THERE A SANTA CLAUS?

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA



JACOB ^{BY} A. RIIS



New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1922

All rights reserved

Replacung 267438

To
Amory Ladd



COPYRIGHT, 1904
BY THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

SET UP AND ELECTROTYPED
PUBLISHED OCTOBER, 1904
REPRINTED DECEMBER, 1904
REPRINTED NOVEMBER, 1912

IS THERE A SANTA CLAUS?

“DEAR MR. RIIS:
“A little chap
of six on the Western
frontier writes to us:

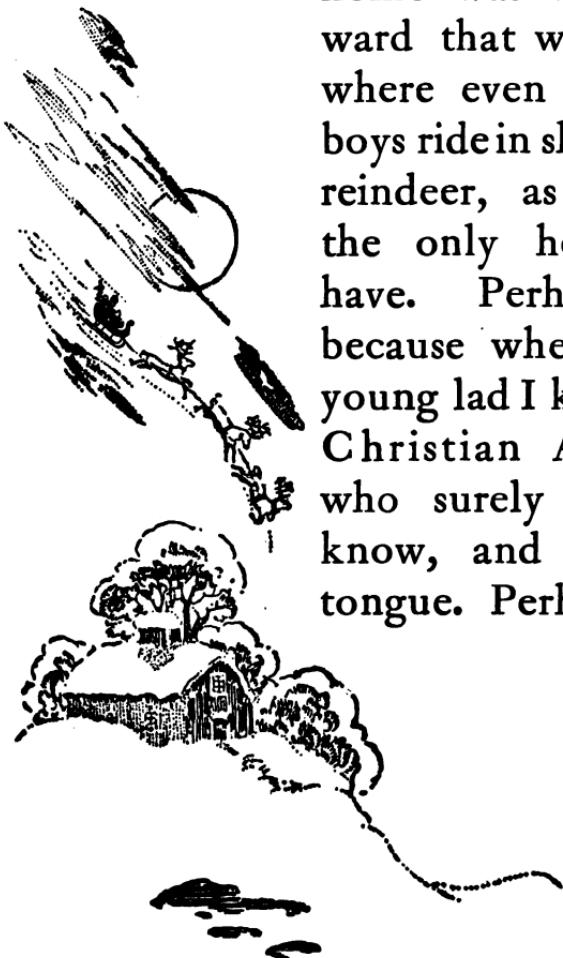
“‘Will you please tell me
if there is a Santa Claus?
Papa says not.’

“Won’t you answer
him?”

That was the message that came to me from an editor last De-



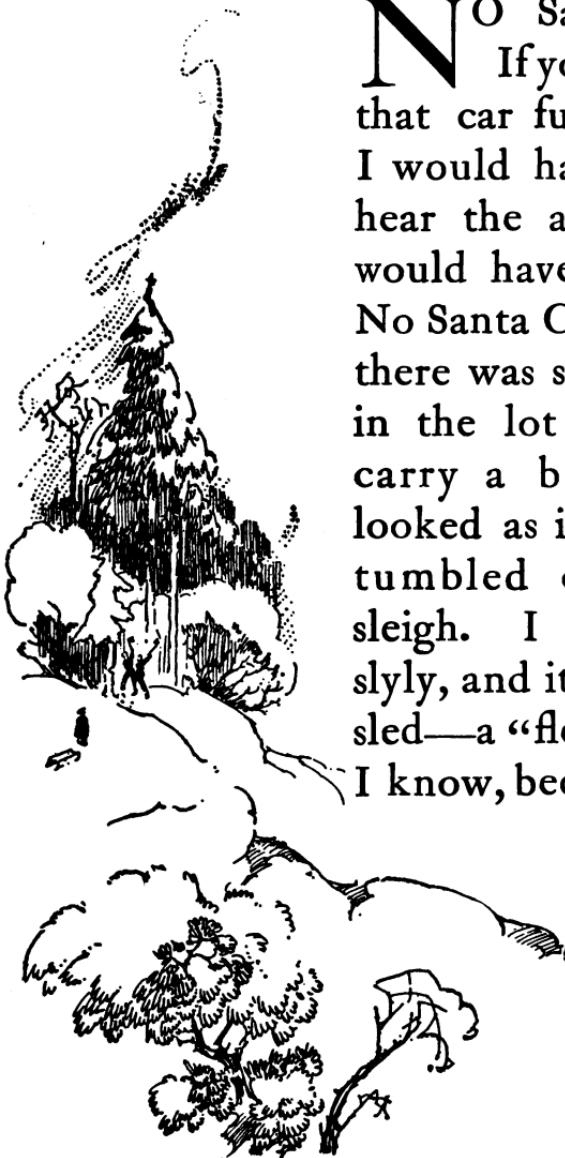
cember just as I was going on a journey. Why he sent it to me I don't know. Perhaps it was because, when I was a little chap, my home was way up toward that white north where even the little boys ride in sleds behind reindeer, as they are the only horses they have. Perhaps it was because when I was a young lad I knew Hans Christian Andersen, who surely ought to know, and spoke his tongue. Perhaps it was



both. I will ask the editor when I see him. Meanwhile, here was his letter, with Christmas right at the door, and, as I said, I was going on a journey.

I buttoned it up in my great coat along with a lot of other letters I didn't have time to read, and I thought as I went to the depot what a pity it was that my little friend's papa should have forgotten about Santa Claus. We big people do forget the strangest way, and then



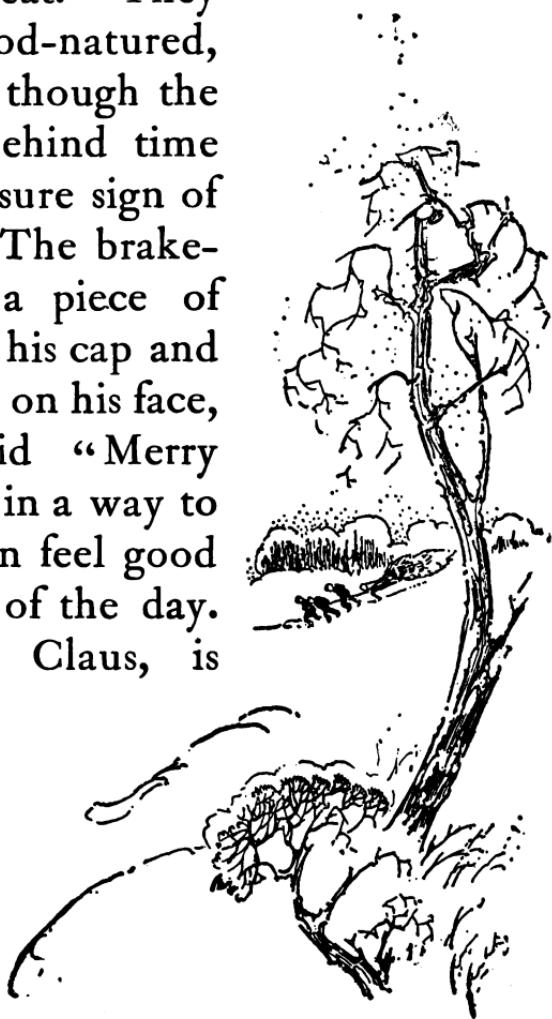


we haven't got a bit of
a good time any more.

NO Santa Claus!
If you had asked
that car full of people
I would have liked to
hear the answers they
would have given you.
No Santa Claus! Why,
there was scarce a man
in the lot who didn't
carry a bundle that
looked as if it had just
tumbled out of his
sleigh. I felt of one
slyly, and it was a boy's
sled—a "flexible flyer,"
I know, because he left

one at our house the Christmas before; and I distinctly heard the rattling of a pair of skates in that box in the next seat. They were all good-natured, every one, though the train was behind time —that is a sure sign of Christmas. The brakeman wore a piece of mistletoe in his cap and a broad grin on his face, and he said “Merry Christmas” in a way to make a man feel good all the rest of the day. No Santa Claus, is

7



there? You just ask him!

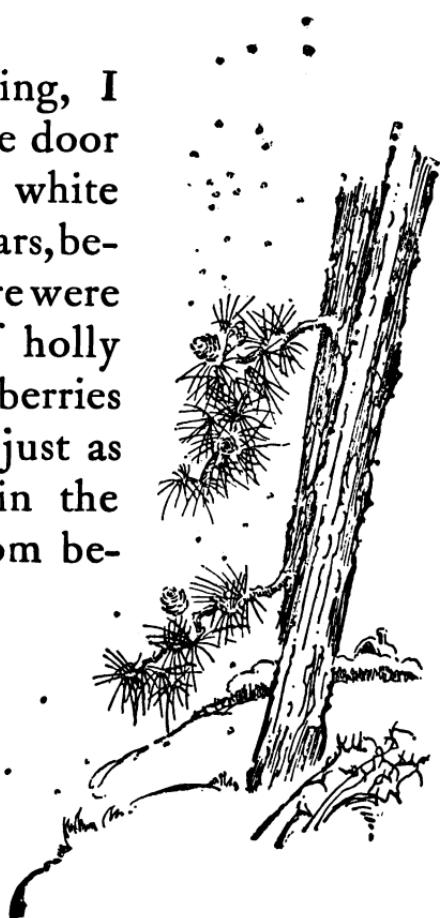
And then the train rolled into the city under the big gray dome to which George Washington gave his name, and by-and-by I went through a doorway which all American boys would rather see than go to school a whole week, though they love their teacher dearly. It is true that last winter my own little lad told the kind man whose house it is that he would rather ride



up and down in the elevator at the hotel, but that was because he was so very little at the time and didn't know things rightly, and, besides, it was his first experience with an elevator.

As I was saying, I went through the door into a beautiful white hall with lofty pillars, between which there were regular banks of holly with the red berries shining through, just as if it were out in the woods! And from be-

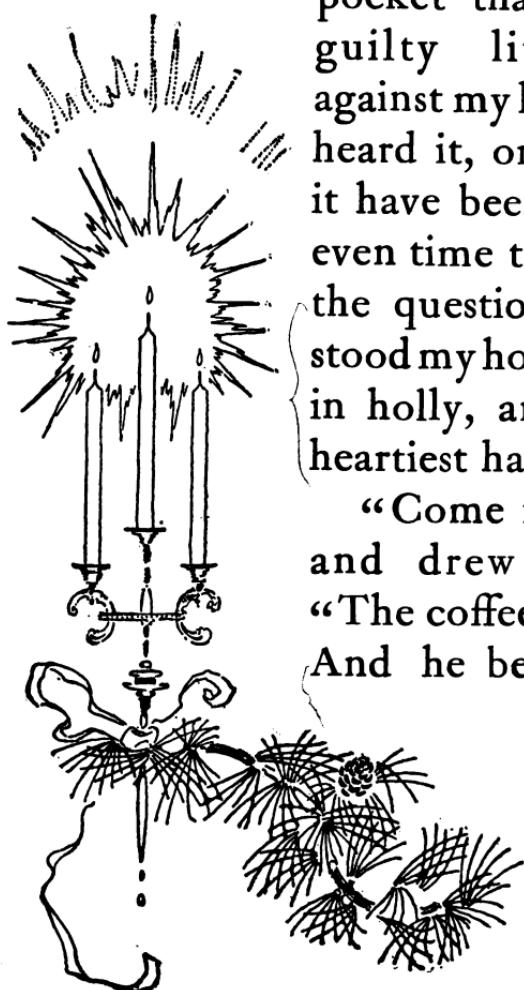
,



hind one of them there
came the merriest laugh
you could ever think of.
Do you think, now, it
was that letter in my
pocket that gave that
guilty little throb
against my heart when I
heard it, or what could
it have been? I hadn't
even time to ask myself
the question, for there
stood my host all framed
in holly, and with the
heartiest handclasp.

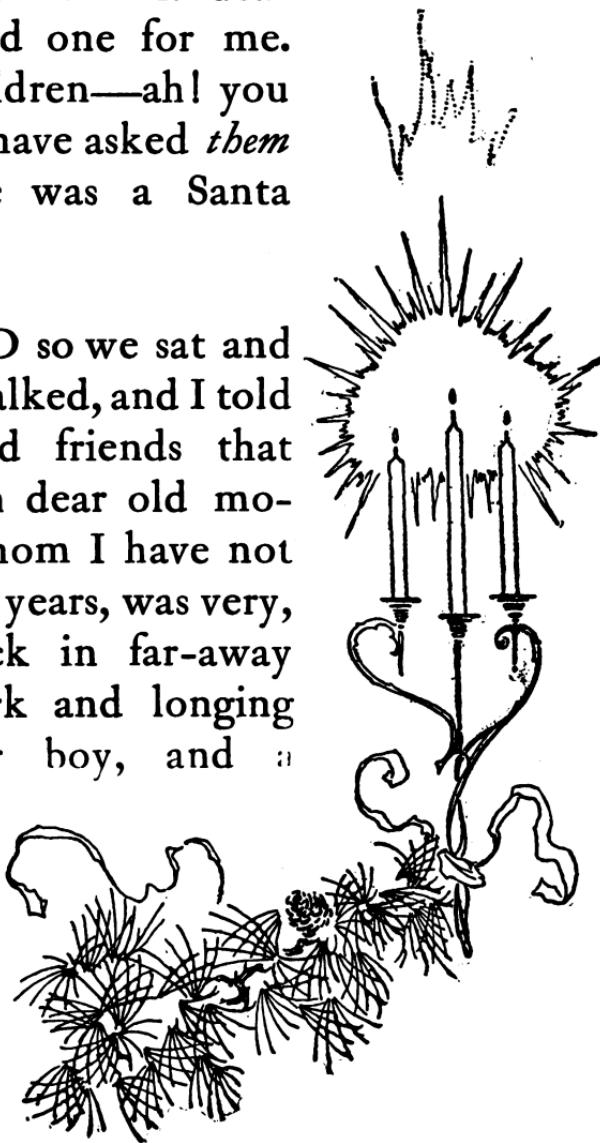
"Come in," he said,
and drew me after.
"The coffee is waiting."
And he beamed upon

10

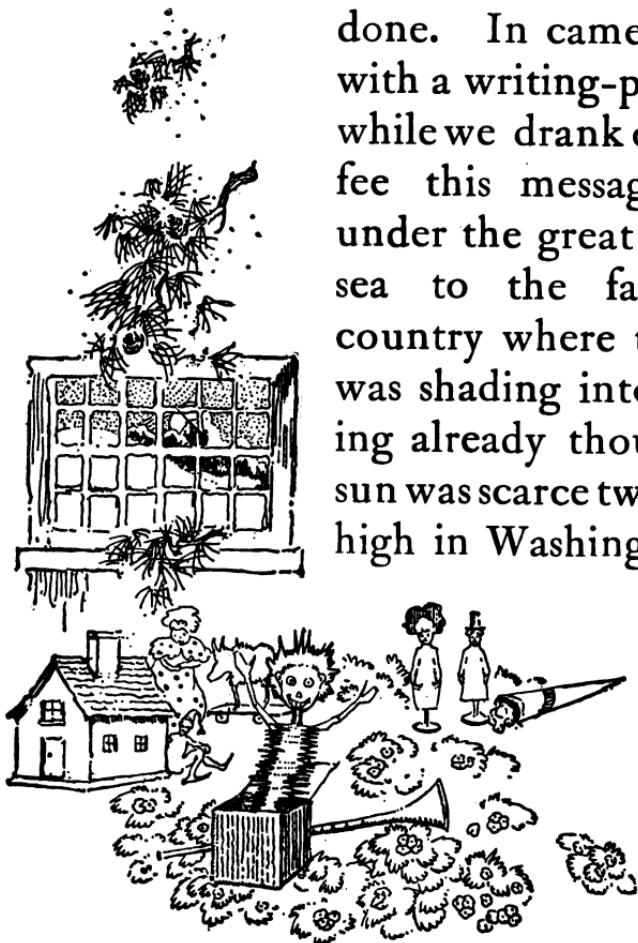


the table with the veriest Christmas face as he poured it out himself, one cup for his dear wife and one for me. The children—ah! you should have asked *them* if there was a Santa Claus!

AND so we sat and talked, and I told my kind friends that my own dear old mother, whom I have not seen for years, was very, very sick in far-away Denmark and longing for her boy, and "



mist came into my hostess's gentle eyes and she said, "Let us cable over and tell her how much we think of her," though she had never seen her. And it was no sooner said than done. In came a man with a writing-pad, and while we drank our coffee this message sped under the great stormy sea to the far-away country where the day was shading into evening already though the sun was scarce two hours high in Washington:



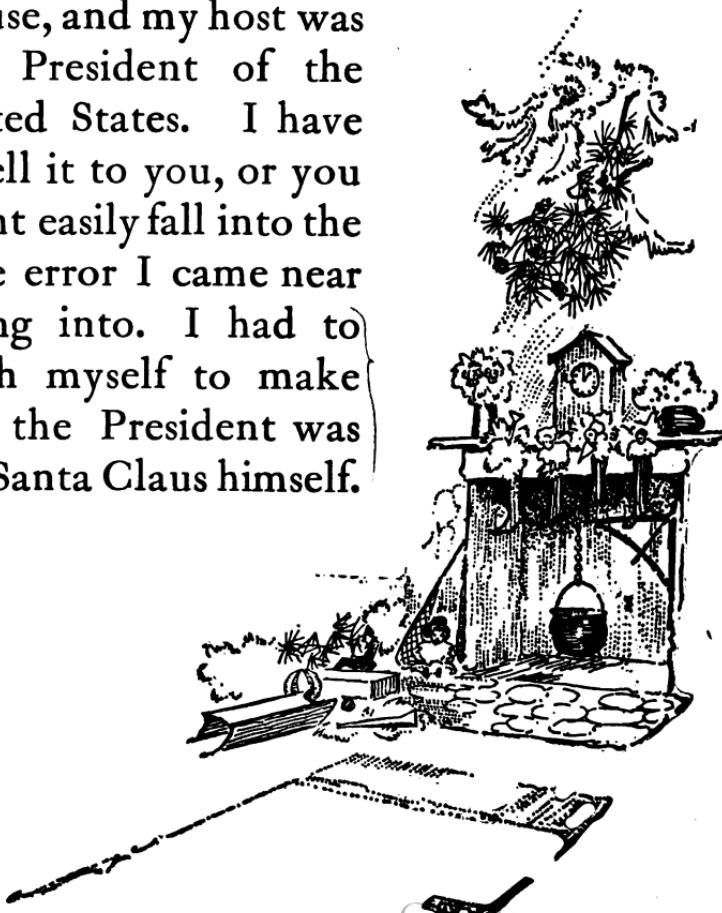
THE WHITE HOUSE.

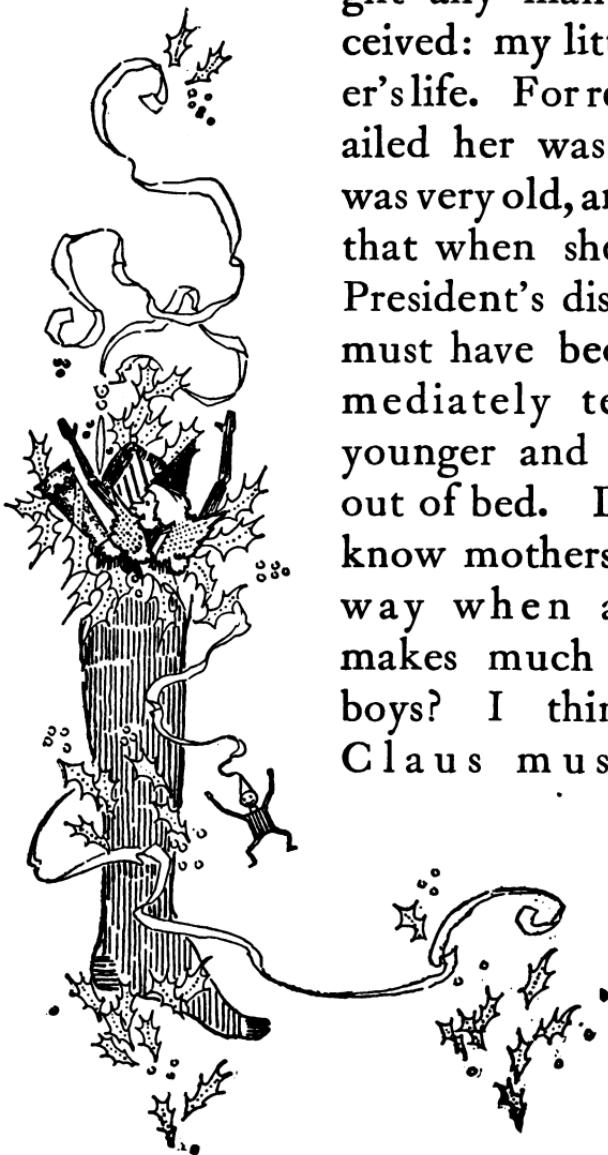
Mrs. Riis, Ribe, Denmark:

Your son is breakfasting with us. We send you our love and sympathy.

THEODORE AND EDITH ROOSEVELT

For, you see, the house with the holly in the hall was the White House, and my host was the President of the United States. I have to tell it to you, or you might easily fall into the same error I came near falling into. I had to pinch myself to make sure the President was not Santa Claus himself.

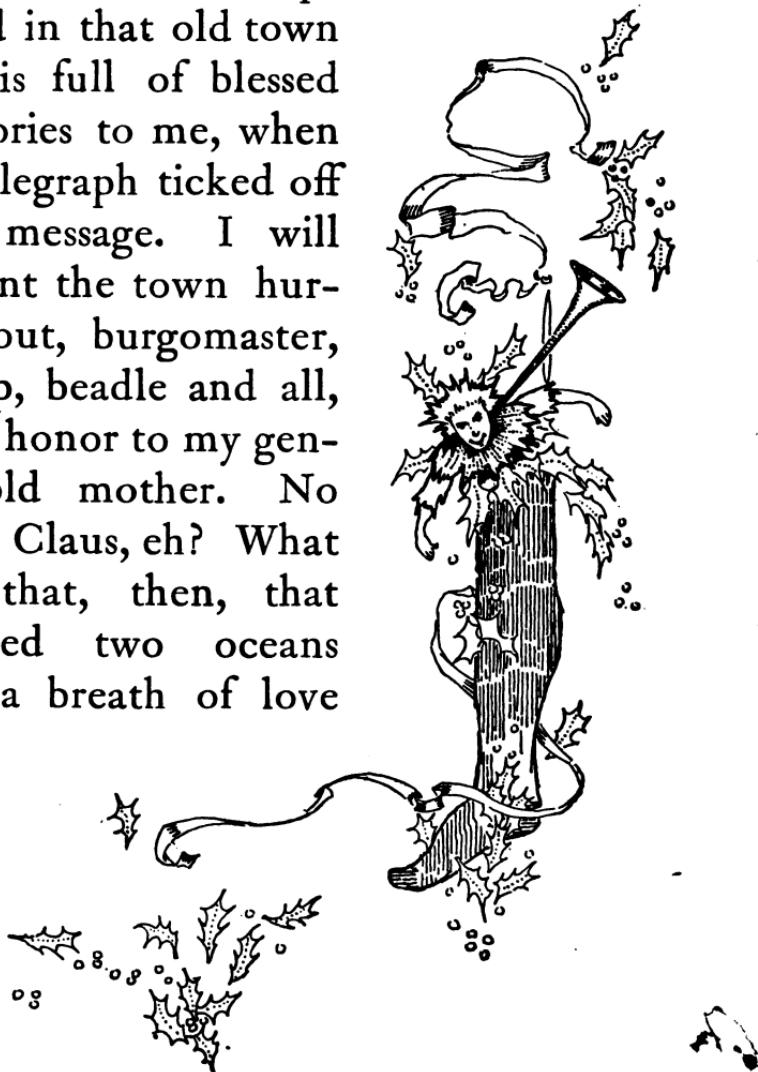


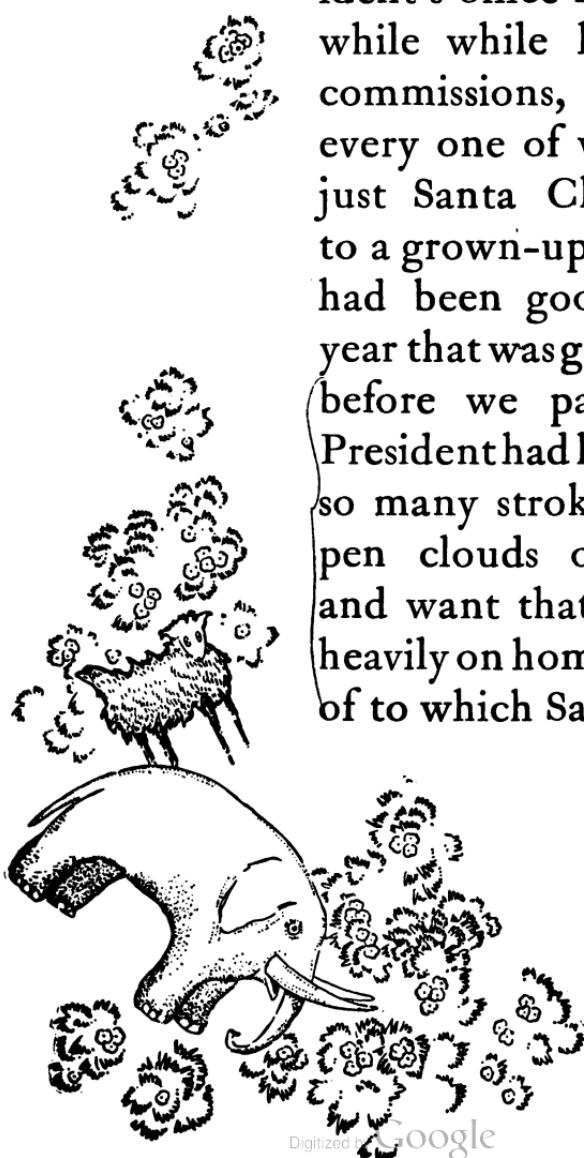


I felt that he had in that moment given me the very greatest Christmas gift any man ever received: my little mother's life. For really what ailed her was that she was very old, and I know that when she got the President's dispatch she must have become immediately ten years younger and got right out of bed. Don't you know mothers are that way when any one makes much of their boys? I think Santa Claus must have

brought them all in the beginning—the mothers, I mean.

I would just give anything to see what happened in that old town that is full of blessed memories to me, when the telegraph ticked off that message. I will warrant the town hurried out, burgomaster, bishop, beadle and all, to do honor to my gentle old mother. No Santa Claus, eh? What was that, then, that spanned two oceans with a breath of love



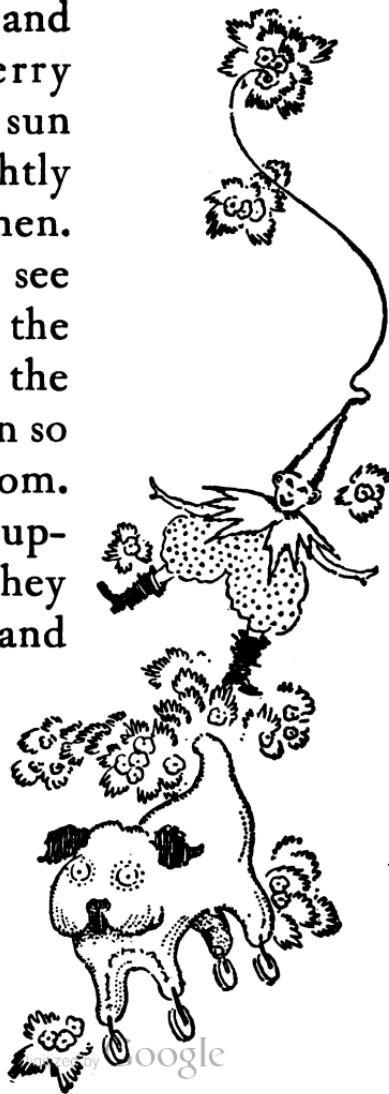


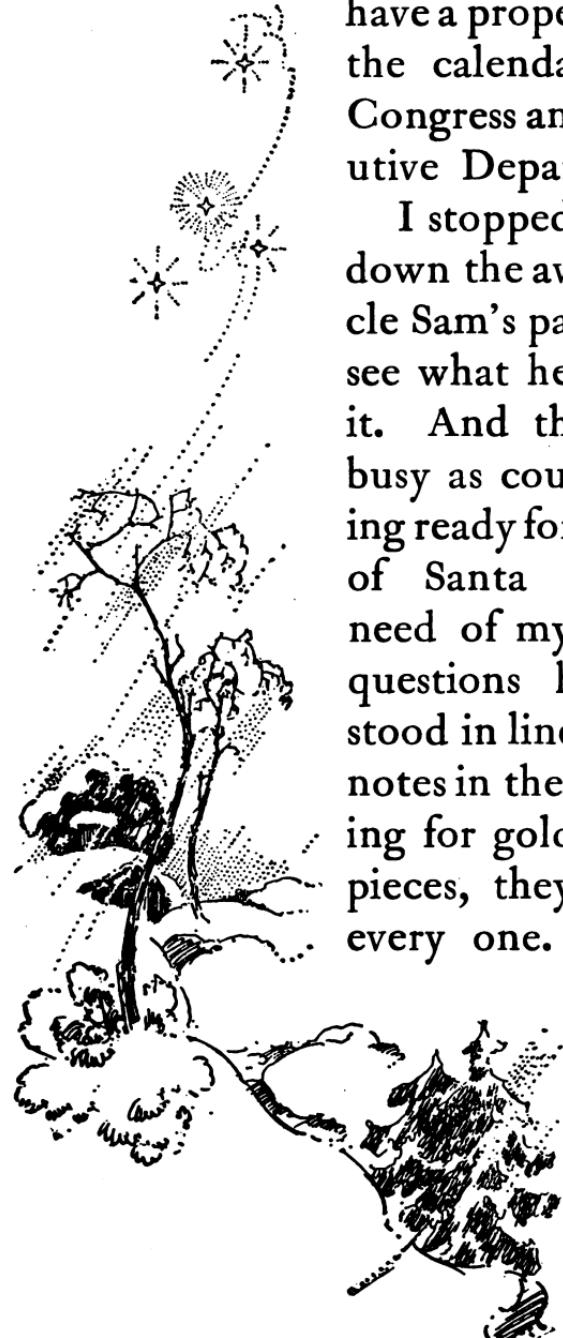
and cheer, I should like
to know. Tell me that!

After the coffee we
sat together in the Pres-
ident's office for a little
while while he signed
commissions, each and
every one of which was
just Santa Claus's gift
to a grown-up boy who
had been good in the
year that was going; and
before we parted the
President had lifted with
so many strokes of his
pen clouds of sorrow
and want that weighed
heavily on homes I knew
of to which Santa Claus

had had hard work finding his way that Christmas.

It seemed to me as I went out of the door, where the big policeman touched his hat and wished me a Merry Christmas, that the sun never shone so brightly in May as it did then. I quite expected to see the crocuses and the jonquils, that make the White House garden so pretty, out in full bloom. They were not, I suppose, only because they are official flowers and



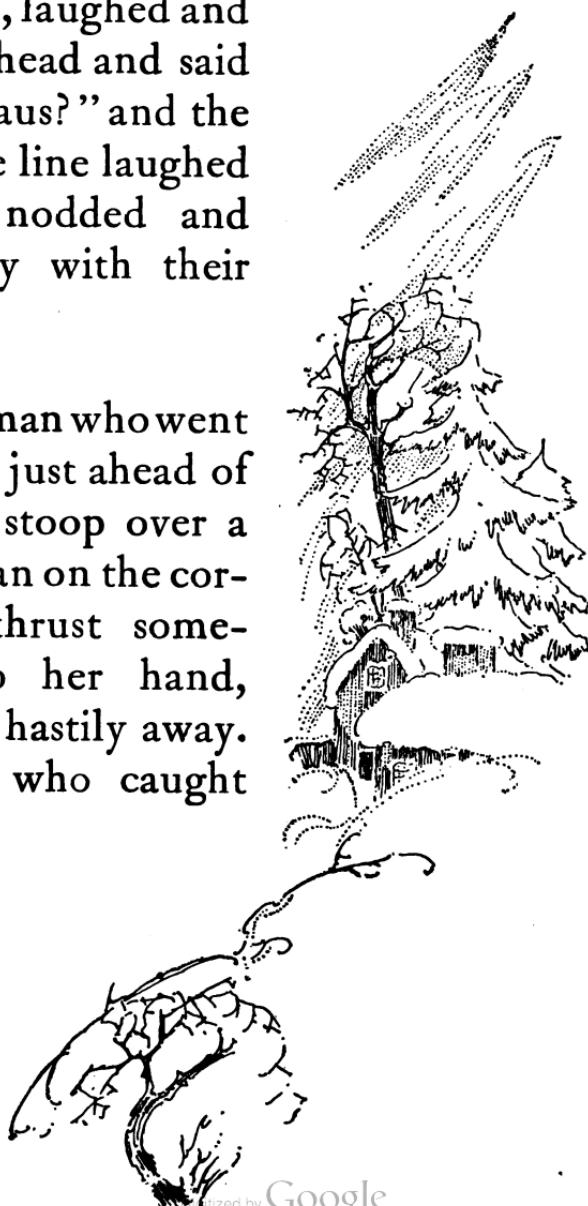


have a proper respect for the calendar that runs Congress and the Executive Department, too.

I stopped on the way down the avenue at Uncle Sam's paymaster's to see what he thought of it. And there he was, busy as could be, making ready for the coming of Santa Claus. No need of my asking any questions here. Men stood in line with banknotes in their hands asking for gold, new gold-pieces, they said, most every one. The pay-

master, who had a sprig
of Christmas green fixed
in his desk just like any
other man, laughed and
shook his head and said
“Santa Claus?” and the
men in the line laughed
too and nodded and
went away with their
gold.

ONE man who went
out just ahead of
me I saw stoop over a
poor woman on the cor-
ner and thrust some-
thing into her hand,
then walk hastily away.
It was I who caught



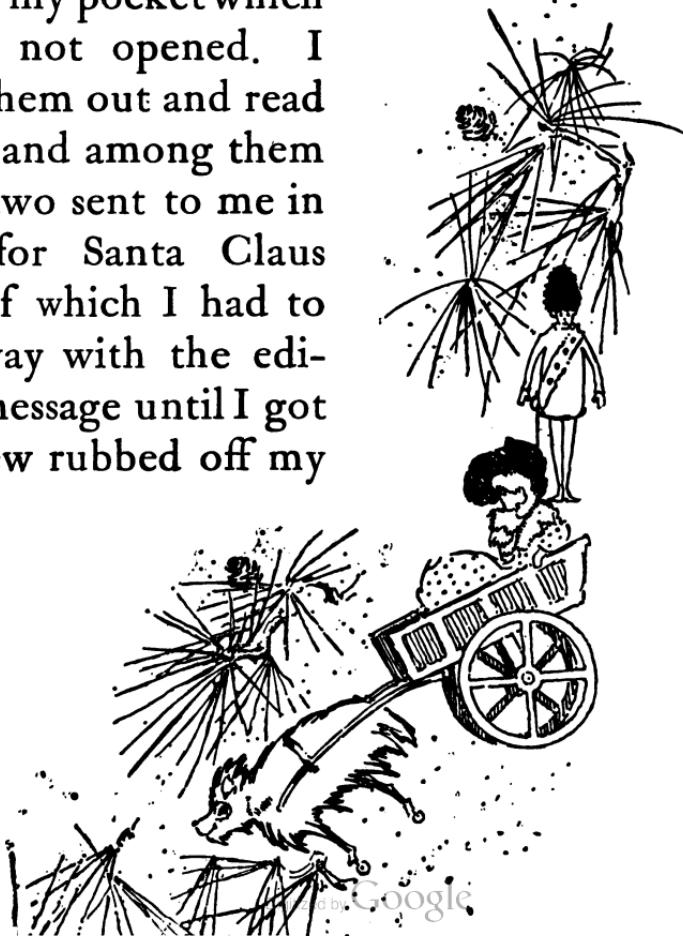
the light in the woman's eye and the blessing upon her poor wan lips, and the grass seemed greener in the Treasury dooryard, and the sky bluer than it had been before, even on that bright day. Perhaps—well, never mind! if any one says anything to you about principles and giving alms, you tell him that Santa Claus takes care of the principles at Christmas, and not to be afraid. As for him, if you want to know, just ask the old

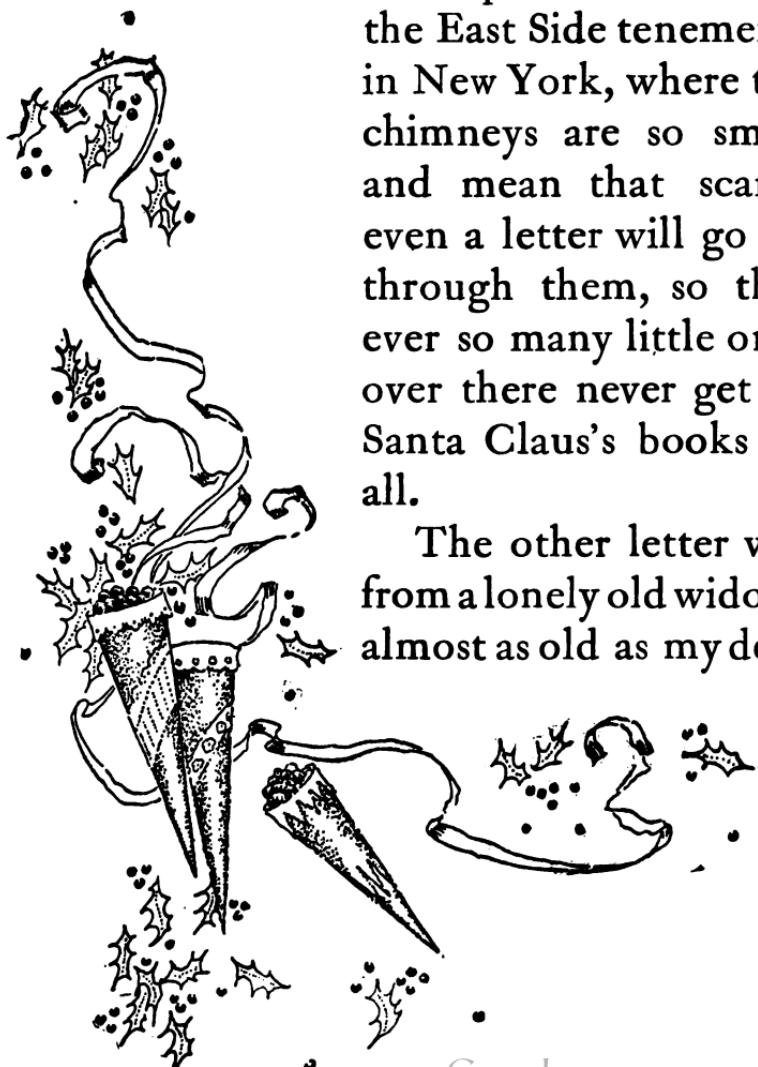
20



woman on the Treasury corner.

And so, walking down that Avenue of Good-will, I came to my train again and went home. And when I had time to think it all over I remembered the letters in my pocket which I had not opened. I took them out and read them, and among them were two sent to me in trust for Santa Claus himself which I had to lay away with the editor's message until I got the dew rubbed off my



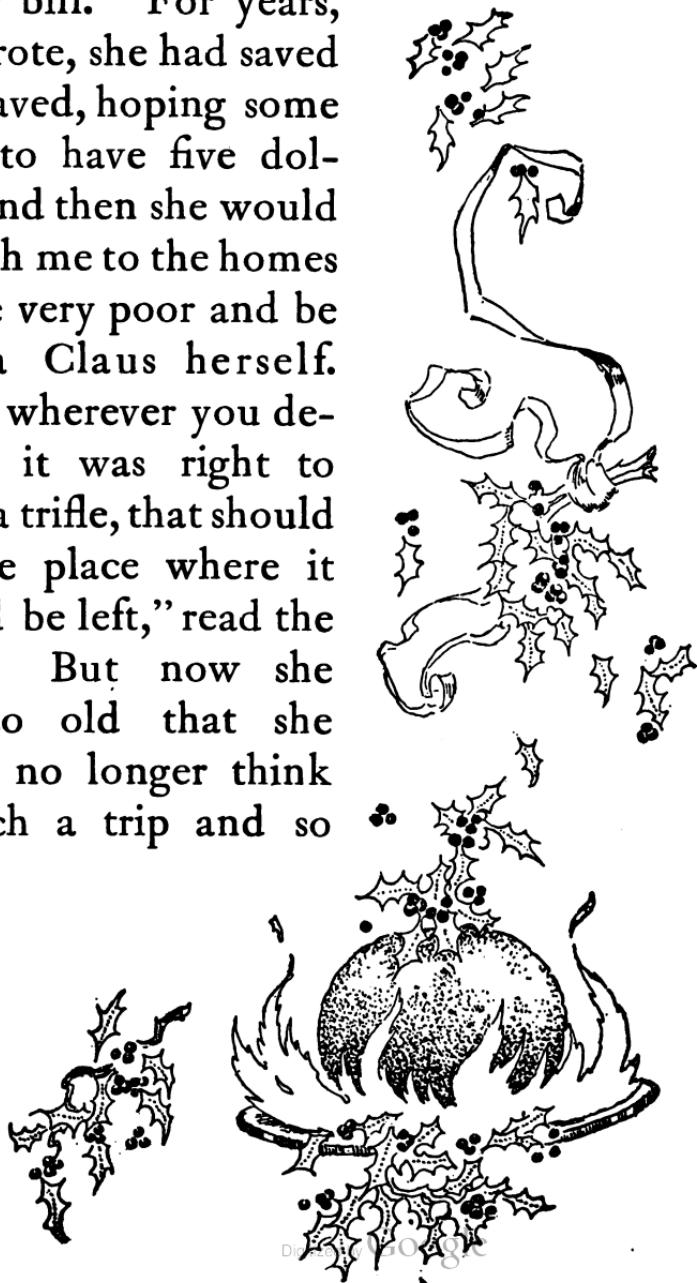


spectacles. One was from a great banker, and it contained a check for a thousand dollars to help buy a home for some poor children of the East Side tenements in New York, where the chimneys are so small and mean that scarce even a letter will go up through them, so that ever so many little ones over there never get on Santa Claus's books at all.

The other letter was from a lonely old widow, almost as old as my dear

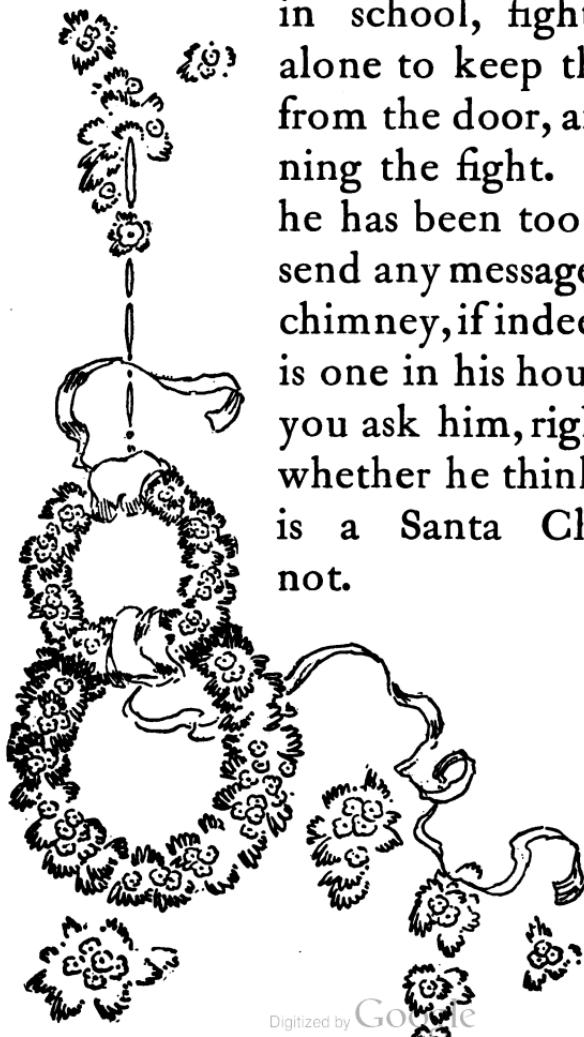
mother in Denmark, and it contained a two-dollar bill. For years, she wrote, she had saved and saved, hoping some time to have five dollars, and then she would go with me to the homes of the very poor and be Santa Claus herself. "And wherever you decided it was right to leave a trifle, that should be the place where it would be left," read the letter. But now she was so old that she could no longer think of such a trip and so

"



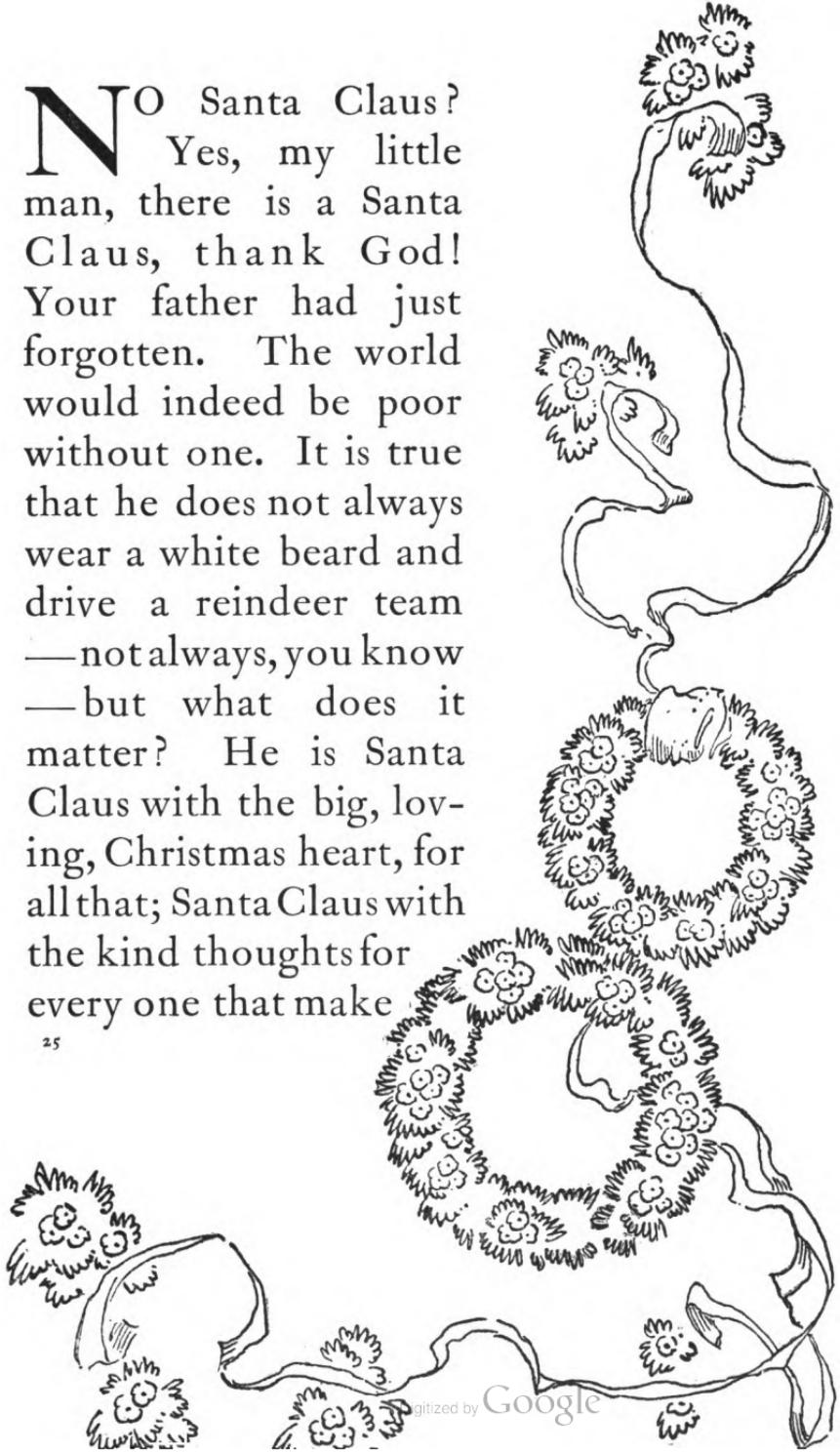
she sent the money she had saved. And I thought of a family in one of those tenements where father and mother are both lying ill, with a boy, who ought to be in school, fighting all alone to keep the wolf from the door, and winning the fight. I guess he has been too busy to send any message up the chimney, if indeed there is one in his house; but you ask him, right now, whether he thinks there is a Santa Claus or not.

24



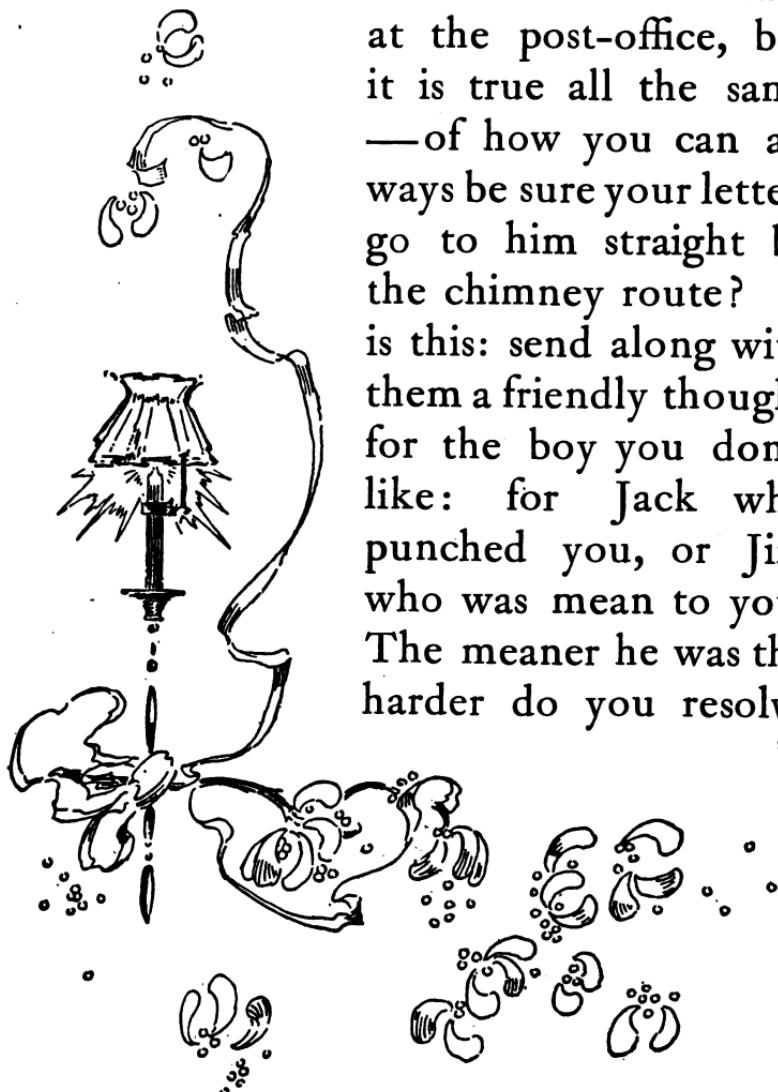
NO Santa Claus?
Yes, my little man, there is a Santa Claus, thank God! Your father had just forgotten. The world would indeed be poor without one. It is true that he does not always wear a white beard and drive a reindeer team —not always, you know —but what does it matter? He is Santa Claus with the big, loving, Christmas heart, for all that; Santa Claus with the kind thoughts for every one that make

25



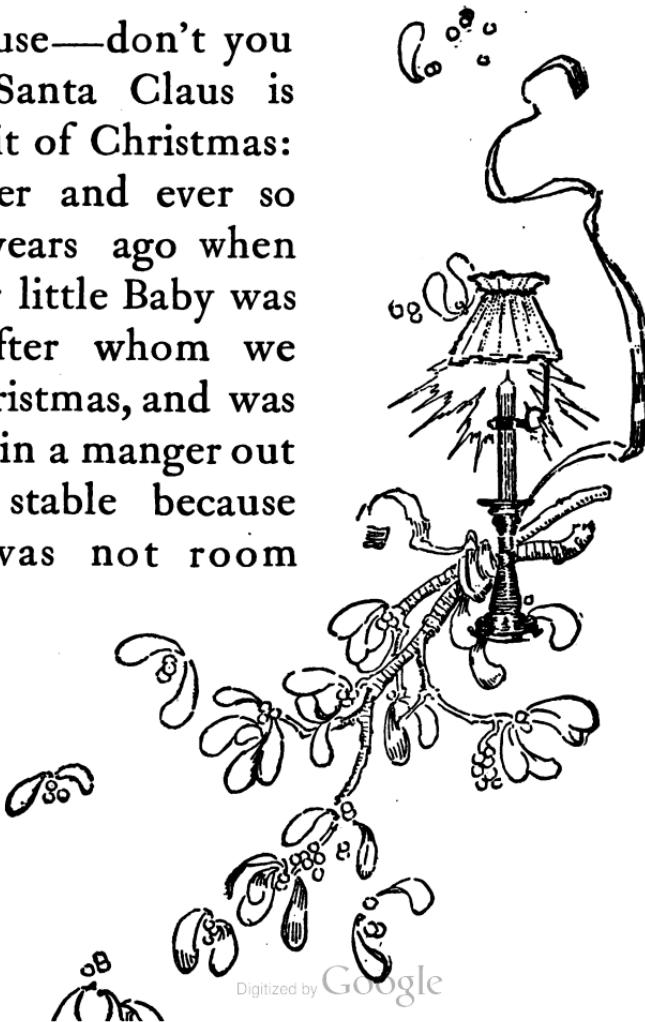
children and grown-up people beam with happiness all day long. And shall I tell you a secret which I did not learn at the post-office, but it is true all the same —of how you can always be sure your letters go to him straight by the chimney route? It is this: send along with them a friendly thought for the boy you don't like: for Jack who punched you, or Jim who was mean to you. The meaner he was the harder do you resolve

“



to make it up: not to bear him a grudge. That is the stamp for the letter to Santa. Nobody can stop it, not even a cross-draught in the chimney, when it has that on.

Because—don't you know, Santa Claus is the spirit of Christmas: and ever and ever so many years ago when the dear little Baby was born after whom we call Christmas, and was cradled in a manger out in the stable because there was not room

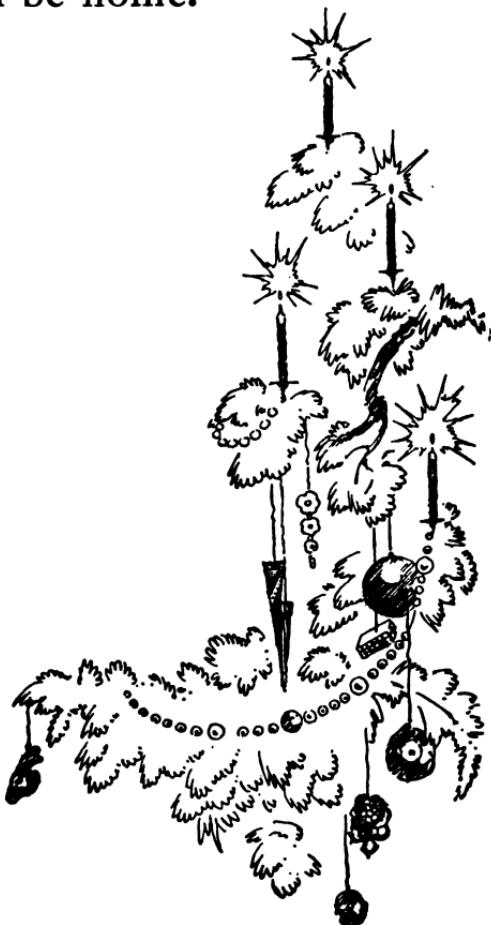


in the inn, that Spirit came into the world to soften the hearts of men and make them love one another. Therefore, that is the mark of the Spirit to this day. Don't let anybody or anything rub it out. Then the rest doesn't matter. Let them tear Santa's white beard off at the Sunday-school festival and growl in his bearskin coat. These are only his disguises. The steps of the real Santa Claus you can trace all through the

28



world as you have done here with me, and when you stand in the last of his tracks you will find the Blessed Babe of Bethlehem smiling a welcome to you. For then you will be home.





THIS

**14 DAY USE
RETURN TO DESK FROM WHICH BORROWED
LOAN DEPT.**

This book is due on the last date stamped below, or
on the date to which renewed.

Renewed books are subject to immediate recall.

3 APR '63 RA	
REC'D LD	
MAR 25 1963	
APR 13 2002	
JAN 21 2006	

LD 21A-50m-11-'62
(D3279s10)476B

General Library
University of California
Berkeley

666104

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

